DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 519 CG 006 451

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TITLE Job-Seeking Behavior and Vocational Development.
INSTITUTION American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.; City Univ. of New York, N.Y. Hunter Coll.
PUB DATE Apr 71
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 4-8, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change, *Behavior Theories, Career Planning, *Developmental Tasks, Employment Interviews, Employment Qualifications, Job Applicants, *Job Application, Job Placement, *Objectives, *Vocational Development

ABSTRACT

Noting that job-seeking behavior, as contrasted with the processes of vocational choice and work adjustment, has been neglected in theories of vocational development, the author identifies three job seeking behavior patterns: (1) individuals exhibiting specific goals and self actualized behavior obtain desired jobs most successfully; (2) those with vague, confused goals and passive-dependent behavior fail to obtain desired jobs; and (3) those exhibiting a mixture of the two have a modicum of success in obtaining desired jobs. Job-seeking behavior is viewed as contingent upon two critical factors: (1) the degree of vocational choice crystallization; and (2) the individual's personal characteristics, dynamics and life style. This material is integrated with Ginzburg's and Super's theories on the process of vocational development and job-seeking behavior and is itself considered as a developmental process. As such. it is seen as meeting the criteria of a theory on vocational development. (Author/TL)

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# Job-Seeking Behavior and Vocational Development

Nancy D. Stevens

In the past two decades, theories of vocational development have focused on only two areas of vocational behavior: occupational choice and work adjustment. Consequently we understand the processes involved in choosing a career and in adjusting to work. However, the vocational behavior exhibited in job-seeking has been neglected and therefore we do not understand the behavioral process involved in getting a job. As a result, we do not have a complete understanding of the total process of vocational development. Without knowledge about this segment of behavior, it is difficult to formulate a comprehensive theory of vocational development which will enable the counselor to predict the effectiveness of an individual's behavior at any stage of his development in all of his vocational activities.

This paper will deal with the behavior exhibited by an individual when he is seeking a job. It is based upon 17 years of research and observation of college and university students and alumni who have sought employment in their chosen fields.

The style of an individual's job-seeking behavior is determined by his personality dynamics and by his subsequent goal crystallization resulting from these dynamics. The job-seeking behavior process and the occupational choice process reflect the individual's stage of growth and development in both psychological and vocational terms. Therefore, job-seeking behavior can be viewed in terms of general developmental principles as applied to the vocational area by Beilin. It can also be related to the process theories of vocational development expounded by Super and Ginzberg.

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Research conducted in 1960 at New York University on 100 job-seeking applicants has shown that job-seeking behavior is differentiable into three patterns, each of which has its own characteristics when it is measured by the Stevens Placement Readiness Scale. The style of behavior exhibited in each pattern is a determining factor in the individual's success in obtaining a job in his chosen field.

Individuals who were highly successful in getting a job in a short period of time were characterized by these findings: realistic, well crystallized, specific job goals with exhibited independent, self-actualized, goal-directed behavior in their efforts to get a job. They tended to use the placement counselor and others as a resource for job vacancy information relative to their vocational goals, and they also tended to incorporate the help given to them into their own structural systems. On the Placement Readiness Scale they were at the high placement readiness level.

In contrast, individuals who failed to get positions, were characterized by these findings: vague, unrealistic job goals, which were expressions of wishfulfillment untempered by reality considerations with passive, dependent, confused and floundering behavior. They tended to rely upon the placement counselor and others to tell them what to do, and they expected the placement counselor to get them a job: a familiar response being: "Tell me what job to take, and I'll take it." On the Placement Readiness Scale they were at the low placement readiness level.

Individuals who had only a modicum of success in obtaining jobs over a long span of time represented the third pattern of job-seeking behavior and were characterized by the following findings: a mixture of the characteristics typical of each of the other two patterns described above, and a tendency to ask a great number of questions.

In some cases behavior seemed to be independent and self-actualized, but some passive and dependent behavior was also exhibited along with it; so that there seemed to be a fluctuating drive to get a job. In other cases, job goals were crystallized; yet sometimes these crystallized goals seemed to be contradicted by the student's confused and unrealistic responses concerning his feelings, which suggested some indecision about his goals. Crystallized job goals were coupled with passive and dependent behavior, while vague job goals were sometimes accompanied by a self-actualized style of behavior which gave an impression of frenetic activity. A characteristic peculiarly typical of this group was the greater number of questions they tended to ask concerning job opportunities, responsibilities, requirements and salaries than did either those who had already specified a job choice or who were still vague and confused about a job choice. Reality considerations were being explored.

Individuals with moderate placement readiness used the Placement Counselor as a resource for job vacancies and occupational information, as well as for a "sounding board" in their efforts to make an occupational choice. On the Placement Readiness Scale, they were at the moderate placement readiness level.

In a study of 150 male(49 ) and female(101) students attending Hunter College in 1968, Schneider and Stevens obtained evidence that gives further support to the observation that personality characteristics are a critical dimension of each job-seeking behavior pattern and ~~that~~ which also adds to the personality picture involved. Using the Stevens Placement Readiness Scale to identify job-seeking behavior patterns and Scheier and Catell's Neurotic Sensitivity Questionnaire to measure personality characteristics, it was found that individuals exhibiting the characterictics of the high

placement readiness pattern have a highly significant incidence of doninance, tough-mindedness and low level of neuroticism which accounts for their assertive behavior, realistic goals and relative freedom from inner conflict. On the other hand, individuals exhibiting the characteristics of the low placement readiness pattern have a highly significant incidence of submissiveness, sensitivity and a high level of neuroticism which accounts for their unrealistic goals and for their inner conflict and ambivalence exhibited in their passive, dependent behavior.

Individuals exhibiting the contradictory behavioral characteristics of moderate placement readiness did not score in any distinctive way on the items on the NSQ scale. This indicates that the personality characteristics of both the patterns described for high and low placement readiness are present. It suggests that these adolescents and adults are in a period of transition, and that the inner conflict and ambivalence they exhibit in their contradictory behavior may account for their modicum of success in obtaining a job. A further analysis of the data obtained on the individuals in this group is needed, and, in fact, is currently under way. However, it is not possible to give a conclusive analysis at this moment in time.

Stevens and Schneider also investigated the role that family dynamics play in job-seeking behavior in an in-depth analysis of clinical data obtained on 18 Hunter College students who were receiving personal counseling and who were also seeking employment. We found that adolescents who exhibited the self actualized behavior typical of the high placement readiness pattern, have grown up in a family atmosphere where they received both encouragement and emotional support. A balance was established in parental relationships. Fathers played warm positive roles and were perceived as

adequate functioning human beings whom they admired. Mothers tended to be warm, consistent, and supportive.

The family environment not only presented opportunities for identification with an appropriate parental figure, but also provided a positive supportive relationship with the parent of the opposite sex as well as freedom to deal openly with hostilities and irritations which appear in day to day living. This family atmosphere also provided the opportunity to develop both independence and interdependence in their actions with others. With the opportunity to relate to role models, strong self-concepts developed and in the employment situation occupational goals were crystallized which reflected needs and interests.

The personality development of individuals who exhibited the passive and dependent behavior, typical of the low placement readiness behavior pattern, is restricted by their family environment. It was found that fathers were passive and ineffectual in their relationships with their sons and daughters, who perceived them to be failures. Mothers were dominant and over-protective, and had high goals and such driving ambitions for their children, that their children felt pressured and overwhelmed.

The effect of this family environment was to make the individuals increasingly resentful and dependent. They were constricted and repressed in expressing their assertiveness, aggressiveness and hostility. They wished to identify with their fathers, but could not do so because of the ineffective role they perceived them to play. They did not wish to identify with their mothers' goals which they felt they needed to achieve, even though they felt incapable of achievement. They frequently developed a passive resistance to success framed in such a way as to deny responsibility for failure in getting a job. This served as a means of showing hostility to the parent who had high expectations of them as individuals.

The internal conflict resulting from the role models in such a family environment developed individuals with poor self-concepts. In the employment situation, they could not recognize their needs, or identify their interests. Their occupational goals reflected a quality of wish fulfillment or fantasy.

Individuals with the conflicting behavioral characteristics typical of the moderate placement readiness pattern, have grown up in a family milieu where mothers also imposed high goals and were over-protective, but, unlike the mothers of adolescents who exhibited the job-seeking characteristics of low placement readiness, they were less domineering and less driving. Fathers were perceived as playing a more adequate and effective role in life than did the fathers of those with low placement readiness, and their sons could identify with them. Although feelings of constriction, inadequacy and dependency were developed, they frequently tended to deny their fears and to show obstinacy and superficial assertiveness which was often demonstrated in counterdependent behavior.

Their behavior revealed some of the pathogenic circumstances reflected in passive job-seeking behavior, together with some of the healthier aspects of goal-oriented behavior. Consequently, in the employment situation, they could more easily consider reality ~~considerations~~ factors in attempting to identify their occupational goals than could those with low placement readiness.

Lewin's system of interpretations of cognitive learning provides a phenomenological approach to understanding the relationships of desires and goals to personality. His Field Theory and his analysis of conflict define some inner processes operating within job-seeking behavior.

Briefly, Lewin thought that the totality of personal experience is the psychological space in which the person moves. This he called life space. It contains the person, the goals that he is either seeking or avoiding, the barriers that

restrict his movements, as well as the paths that lead to his desires. How situations are perceived determines individual behavior. Certain objects or situations in regions of the life space may attract the individual so that he moves toward them. These regions have positive valence. Other regions have negative valence and movement toward them is repelled.

Individuals who are goal-oriented in their job-seeking behavior, or at least in some aspects of it, can be typical of Lewin's model of approach-approach conflict.

In moving toward their goal (a positive valence), they frequently are presented with more than one job opportunity. They may feel drawn at first toward more than one job. Each job opportunity directly related to the desired goal has a positive valence, and therefore some inner conflict would result in having to decide which job to choose. Some indecision is a normal reaction to such a situation. Conflict is produced because it is not possible to choose all of the opportunities available. Worry, some anxiety, and vacillation of behavior may result temporarily.

In the process of considering possible career options, one occupational field or job may seem at first to be most attractive (a positive valence). As further exploration is undertaken, it may lose some of its attractiveness and recede in importance in the individual's consideration. As it recedes, other opportunities become more attractive, and one by one they are the focus of attention (positive valence).

These conflicts are not serious in nature. The resulting process that follows seems to involve a sorting out so that a ~~the~~ choice can be made. Behavior then moves toward obtaining the goal,(positive valence).

Individuals who are passive and dependent in their job-seeking behavior, or at least in some aspects of it, may illustrate Lewin's avoidance-avoidance and also the approach-avoidance models of conflict.

Avoidance-avoidance conflict evolves when the individual wishes to avoid both of two possible situations (negative valences), but in actuality, he can avoid only one. The reaction is vascillating behavior. The individual who is under pressure to achieve a goal because of the dominating influence of others, but who also fears failure on the job, would wish to avoid moving toward an appropriate job opportunity (negative valence). Yet, he would also be afraid of not exploring such an opportunity. Not to apply for the job opportunity could result in further problems with the domineering family member for having failed to get the job and achieve the goal. He also wishes to avoid that situation.

As the individual gets nearer to the job prospect, it begins to repel him, and he moves away from the opportunity (negative valence). How he moves away may depend on the extent of his maladjustment. He may actually make an appointment for an interview, but be incapable of entering the building at the appointed time. If he should go as far as appearing for the interview, and the prospect of obtaining the job becomes increasingly repelling to him, his behavior will become self-defeating so that he will either start withdrawing in the interview or will state his qualifications in a negative manner. The employer can recognize and react to these negatively qualifying statements that the individual makes about his own background and experience: for example, "I only have had three years experience, and just handled the less important accounts." The employer's interest wanes and turns toward another applicant who stated: "I have had two years experience and handled small accounts until a year ago when I assumed more responsibility."

Rather than accept the consequences of his behavior in the interview for not having been hired, he will attempt to justify his failure in getting the job by blaming the employer for being prejudiced, or the placement office for not sending

him to the right job. In so doing, he feels he may avoid the possible derision and discomfort at home. At best, this is only a temporary release until the next time he is presented with another appropriate job opportunity by either the placement office or a well meaning friend.

He also may avoid conflict by never applying for the job; that is, by "leaving the field." His fear and anxiety can be at such a high level that he is actually incapable of functioning in the job-seeking situation. Consequently, he remains passive and makes no effort to apply for the job, because the negative valences perceived in the situation are too overwhelming for him to cope with.

Depending on how he perceives the factors, or objects in the situation, his behavior may also illustrate Lewin's approach — avoidance model. Having successfully avoided the job, his need for employment has not been met. He again applies for a job (positive valence) which is appropriate for his expressed goal. Because the same inner dynamics are in operation, the process described above repeats.

Inner strain and conflict ensue, because the conflict cannot be resolved by "leaving the field." When he copes with his fears by <u>not</u> applying for the job, the negative valences would cease to operate, thus causing positive valences to begin to function. When the individual is at a distance from the job interview situation, negative valences would become sufficiently weakened, and positive valences would begin to strengthen him to the point where he would again actively seek employment, and the whole cycle would begin again.

When such a person is desperate because he still is unemployed he may take a job for which he is actually over-qualified. In doing so, he feels that he is unlikely to fail — than if he took a job commensurate with his ability and back-ground.

These conflicts are serious in nature, and are indicative of inner conflict and disturbed behavior. Through personal counseling, these individuals may be helped to resolve their conflicts provided that the negative valences which the situations hold can be reduced. Until this can be accomplished, they will be unable to move with effective job-seeking behavior toward obtaining a job goal.

Rogers' (1951) propositions for a generalized theory of personality dynamics may also serve as guidelines for a further understanding of the behavior in job-seeking.

Rogers postulated that the individual reacts to reality as it is perceived and that there is a basic tendency toward actualizing, maintaining, or enhancing himself. Consequently, behavior is the goal-directed attempt to satisfy needs as they are experienced and perceived. Perception of reality is the critical factor in determining behavior.

As a result of interaction with the social environment, a consistent concept of self is developed. Experiences which are perceived accurately, symbolized, organized and assimilated in the self-structure lead to adaptive, realistic behavior and psychological adjustment, but experiences which are perceived inaccurately, given distorted symbolization, or denied symbolization because the experience is inconsistent with the concept of self, can lead to defensive and unrealistic behavior and psychological maladjustment.

Super (1963) also suggests that an unrealistic evaluation of the inner factors may be influenced either by misinterpretation and distortion of the individual's experiences because they are inaccurately perceived and symbolized, or by an avoidance of certain experiences which may not reinforce an idealized aspect of the self-concept. He also indicates that the manner in which the individual perceives, symbolizes and assimilates information gained from experience, is a factor which modifies his self-concept. Consequently, the individual with confused goals and dependent, passive behavior would have a poor self-concept; whereas, the individual with specific goals and

and self-actualized behavior would have a strong self-concept.

Therefore, considering job-seeking behavior in light of Rogers' propositions, the individual who reacts to the reality of seeking a job with passive and confused behavior, tends to have perceived experience inaccurately so that he takes on the values of others and is dependent on them. This is illustrated by the applicant who says, "Tell me what job to take, and I'll take it!" His attitudes and values are not shaped from his own experience. Therefore, factors which influence a choice of job tend to be perceived inadequately. Consequently, when left on his own to make a choice, he is vague and confused. Because of his inability to balance factors affecting a job choice, unrealistic choices are made which are the products of wish fulfillment.

On the other hand, the individual who is goal-directed in his behavior adequately perceives the factors which must influence his choice of job. His choices are realistic and his behavior is adaptive, depending upon the conscious balancing of many social and personal factors affecting his choices. As a result of this balancing process, a compromise may be affected between what is desired and what is possible. Individuals who readily obtain jobs illustrate a type of actuallizing and maintaining behavior defined by Rogers' postulations.

The dynamic process of behavior in job-seeking can be viewed as a developmental process reflecting the individual's stage of vocational development. The behaviors identified as characteristic of each level of placement readiness by the Placement Readiness Scale may be considered as points on a continuum of job-seeking behavior. The characteristic behavior unique to low-placement readiness is differentiated from the behavior exhibited in high placement readiness and the characteristics of behavior in the moderate placement readiness are essentially a mixture of the behaviors typical of both high and low placement readiness which suggests that they may be in a transitional stage.

Inasmuch as individuals mature at varying rates of development, this suggests that any given individual's behavior may fall at any given point on a job-seeking continuum depending on the stage of his growth and development.

The behavior expressed in all three job-seeking patterns does relate to different stages in both Ginzberg's and Super's theories on the process of vocational development. The three different stages of Ginzberg are paralell to the sub-stages that Super defines and job-seeking behavior corresponds to these same periods.

Individuals who are at the low end of the job-seeking behavior continuum and whose goals are vague, confused, and an expression of wish fulfillment untempered by reality considerations, would be in the fantasy stage of vocational development. Their level of development would also correspond to Super's fantasy period, the first sub-stage of his Exploration Stage.

Individuals whose job-seeking behavior is at the low end of the Moderate Placement Readiness level exhibit some vascillation in identifying their goals, and they explore possibilities with many questions. They would be in Ginzberg's Tentative Stage of vocational development and could be in any period of that stage, be it the interest period, the capabilities, the values or the transitional periods, depending on the stage of their growth and development. Other individuals who would be at the high end of the moderate placement readiness level would be at the exploration period of the Realistic Stage. According to Super's theory, these individuals would also be at the tentative sub-stage of the Exploration Stage.

Individuals with well crystallized and specified goals would also be in Ginzberg's Realistic Stage at the crystallization and specification periods. This also would correspond to Super's realistic sub-stage of the Exploration Stage. Independent, goal-oriented behavior combined with well crystallized goals, is the most effective job-seeking behavior. Therefore, it is the behavior pattern which can best enable the individual

to implement his self-concept and to enter the Establishment Stage of his vocational development.

According to Ginzberg, an individual who is at the Fantasy Stage of vocational development, but who is older than the pre-adolescent age range of 6-12 is deviating from the norm of development for his age group. If he is an adolescent ranging in age from 13-18 he would be expected to be at the Tentative Stage which would be the normal stage of development for his age. If, however, he is in his twenties, thirties or forties, etc. and is at the tentative stage, he would be deviating from a normal pace of development. He would be expected to be in the Realistic Stage of vocational development.

For the healthy individual, development is in the direction of self-actualization so that movement on a job-seeking behavior continuum is in the direction of greater differentiation — that is, toward crystallization and specification of job goals with an ever increasing consideration of reality factors. Behavior also tends to move in the direction of independence, becoming increasingly less influenced by the preferences of others and more influenced by the individual's own preferences. This quality of movement reflects the normal developing process of increasing maturation and integration of self. Such development is an expression of self-actualization.

Job-seeking behavior occurs at a developmental pace. For the mature and integrated individual with goal-oriented behavior, the pace tends to be rapid at first and slows down with time. That is at first, the range of possible job goals is vast, but as opportunities are explored and reality factors come increasingly into consideration, the range of opportunities is continuously narrowed and more and more of the possibilities are ruled out. Consequently, with increasing age, the number of career choices tend to decrease.

However, for the immature individual who is passive, dependent and floundering, the pace of development seems to be stunted. For such an individual in spite of increasing age, the number of career opportunities tends not to decrease despite a period of exploration. Since an evaluative process is not in operation, a compromise is not possible. The range of possible opportunities is unable to be sorted out. Therefore, a career choice remains uncrystallized.

For the integrated, mature and healthy individual, growth and development can only be in the direction of greater differentiation the tendency is for behavior to become less random and floundering and more effective and goal-oriented. Job goals become less vague and confused and more crystallized and specific. Movement could only occur in reverse—that is from specified goals and goal-oriented behavior toward vague goals and passive behavior--if and when the individual's personality organization disintegrates.

In career counseling sessions with college students, we have seen evidence of movement toward more realistic and crystallized goals from unrealistic, confused and vaguely expressed goals. This has occurred when the counseling focuses on the student's personal and family dynamics.

During the course of counseling, periodic spot-check evaluations with the Placement Readiness Scale revealed changes in the students' behavior indicating that the students moved from low through moderate toward the high placement readiness level. That is, the individual's goals become increasingly oriented in reality so that goals which were at first vaguely expressed became better crystallized. For example:

which is supportive evidence to the concept that job-seeking behavior is a continuum

Mrs. J, and older woman seeking a job expressed her job goal as follows: "I want a job working with children ... doing anything ... it doesn't really matter ... I tell you,

they're so adorable, I'll take anything you can give me with children." In reply to the placement counselor's attempt to get further clarification, she replied: "It doesn't matter what I do, or how much they'll pay me. I mean it ... get me a job doing something — anything — with children, and I'll take it."

She vaguely identified her goal as "something" or "anything" with children and she was passively dependent upon the counselor to get her a job: which is typical of the individual with the low placement readiness pattern.

In subsequent counseling interviews, Mrs. J's expressed need to be working with children was explored, and a deeper awareness of her feelings concerning her own childlessness resulted. In her third interview, she asked if she could explore occupational information on fields in which she might work with children. At this point, her exploratory behavior was typical of the Moderate Placement Readiness pattern.

In subsequent interviews with the counselor, she began to evaluate the various fields —social work, teaching, ~~coun-~~ counseling, school psychology. She explored these in terms of her interests, skills, needs and responsibilities. As a result of this process, she began to reveal some high placement readiness characteristics, when in her 7th interview she stated: "Tell me what job vacancies you have for a case aid in an adoption agency. I want to try out that kind of work. If I like it — if I find that I can really be of help to these youngsters — then I'll go to graduate school for my MSW ... but I'll need to earn money so I can do <u>that</u>, and I must know what kind of a salary I can expect to earn as an Aid."

She was finally crystallizing a choice in specific terms, and reality considerations were entering into her thinking. She was no longer expressing a desire to work with children because they were "adorable." She wanted to work with children because she might be able to help them to have a better chance in life

by means of the new parents she could find for them.

In conclusion, job-seeking behavior is a continuous developmental process which corresponds to the stages of vocational development defined by Ginzberg and Super. It's three patterns are clearly the effect of at least two components: the individual's personality dynamics and the degree of the development in crystallizing an occupational choice. Thus, in the job-seeking situation, highly effective coping behavior is clearly associated with realistic, specified goals and assertive, self-actualized, independent behavior, whereas, ineffective coping behavior is clearly associated with vague goals and passive, dependent behavior.

At this point, I want to share with you some observations on recent college students which raise a question about the use of age ranges which Ginzberg found in 1950 represented normal development in the vocational stages. In 1966 Everett Stephens and I surveyed a national sampling of students concerning factors affecting their choice of career goal. We were startled to find that 52% of the men and 46% of the women had specified their choice by their sophomore year — or roughly by age 19. Our data also showed that the pattern of responses from students in liberal arts colleges closely resembled the pattern of responses made by the business college students who had selected a professional course of study.

In 1967 and 1968 the degree of crystallization of occupational choices was again tested out on 360 women and 64 men in their freshmen year at Hunter College who attended an orientation on a liberal arts education and career opportunities sponsored by the Career Counseling and Placement Bureau. 69% of the men and 76% of the women students indicated that they had already crystallized their choices. Interviews with a small selected sample of this population revealed that they had indeed gone through the observable stages of development described by Ginzberg, but at a much faster pace so that they had actually entered the realistic stage of vocational development

at the ages of 14 - 17 —— a time when Ginzberg would have expected them to begin the tentative stage of development.

We need to remember that Ginzberg identified the age span for his stages during the late 1940s on a sample of middle class students attending Columbia University. The student populations in the national study and in the Hunter College setting in the late 1960s represented a wider sampling of socio-economic classes than did Ginzberg's. This suggests that development is modified by cultural and class differences as well as by life experiences in different time periods.

Today in 1971 further changes seem to be evolving as a result of our current social revolution. We find an increasing number of students who are not work-oriented, and who do not hold the values represented by the Protestant Ethic to be meaningful. They hold a new set of values to be of importance.

Consequently, I feel that a new question needs to be raised about the seeming vague goals and passive behavior exhibited in low placement readiness. For some students with this behavior pattern, it may not indicate personal maladjustment as much as it may reflect a cultural lag with society's current values which we know are in a state of transition. Whatever the cause, the behavior representative of the low placement readiness pattern does not bring success in getting a job. Further exploration is needed to better understand this phenomenon. There is still much to learn about the small segment of vocational behavior called job-seeking behavior.